

March 23, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
361-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
1705 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities
1011 Longfellow House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, and Minority Leader Boehner.

We, the undersigned, support expanding community and national service opportunities for Americans of all ages. In this difficult time for our country, service remains an enduring American value that brings people together and reminds us of the strength of our common bond.

Now, more than ever, we need to tap America's greatest national resource: our citizens. Americans have always met great challenges with unity, a spirit of innovation, and a deeply held belief that

America is capable of achieving anything. We have seen first hand how important community and national service can be to helping solve problems in communities across our country. In addition to the thousands of Americans who have volunteered for military service, civilian service members are helping schoolchildren build greater academic skills, mentoring young people, improving our public parks, assisting the elderly, strengthening access to community health projects, fighting poverty, and acting as role models for us all.

Service also strengthens our democracy. It creates bonds of understanding between volunteers of all social and cultural backgrounds, and fosters a powerful sense of common purpose, both of which carry over into everyday life. Americans of all ages, from Millennials to Boomers, are volunteering to serve in record numbers, and it is important to make sure that meaningful opportunities exist for every citizen American that steps forward to serve.

Strengthening and expanding community and national service during this economic crisis makes great sense. Service organizations help Americans in need and reinforce the already frayed social safety net. With unemployment soaring among young and older Americans alike, service also offers productive work at low cost to non-profit and community based organizations across America. National service, in particular, helps Americans develop skills that are useful in seeking and succeeding in private and public sector jobs. We strongly embrace the effort to expand national and community service opportunities as proposed by President Obama and a bi-partisan group of Congressional leaders led by Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah).

We also believe that the provisions in H.R. 1388 will make it possible for more Americans to serve, stimulate more volunteering and increase the diversity of those serving. We also believe that the reforms contained in the bill will ensure accountability, transparency, and results, while providing administrative simplification to help faith and community-based organizations—particularly those smaller nonprofits operating in rural areas and in economically disadvantaged communities—to more effectively meet community needs.

With these proposed new service opportunities and a social investment fund, states across America would be able to tap into the leadership of the American people in addressing the challenges we face together. We urge the Congress to promptly pass and fully fund the bi-partisan Serve America Act.

The time is now to come together through service.

Sincerely,

Brigadier General Clarke M. Binnall, USA Ret.

John Bridgeland, CEO, Civic Enterprises

Major Paula Broadwell, USA

Colonel Herman Bulls, USA Ret.

Neil Bush, Vice-Chair, Points of Light Institute

Mortimer Caplin, Former Commissioner, IRS

Raymond Chambers

Major General Leo M. Childs, USA Ret.

Edwin Cohen, Founding Chair, Echoing Green Foundation

Major Craig Cummings, USA Ret.

Laura Dempsey, Gold Star Families

Rabbi Marla J. Feldman, Commission on Social Action of Reform of Judaism

Joel L. Fleishman, Professor of Law and Public Policy Studies, Sam and Ronnie Heyman Center on Ethics, Public Policy and the Professions

General William G.T. Turtle Jr., USA Ret.

Brigadier General Gerald E. Galloway, USA Ret.

Stephen Goldsmith, Professor of Government, Harvard University

Colonel Rob J. Gordon III, USA Ret.

Gary Hart, Former U.S Senator

Mellody Hobson, President, Ariel Fund

Dr. Joel C. Hunter, Northland-A Church Distributed, Orlando FL

Walter Isaacson, President and CEO, Aspen Institute

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Arbuckle Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School

Governor Tom Kean, Former Governor, New Jersey

Caroline Kennedy, Vice Chair, New York City Fund for Public Schools

Sherry Lansing, CEO, The Sherry Lansing Foundation

Mike McCurry, Public Strategies

Brad Meltzer, Author

Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan

Sam Nunn, Former U.S. Senator

Dr. Mehmet Oz, Chairman and Founder, HealthCorps

Craig Newmark, Founder of Craigslist

Colonel Jay M. Parker, USA Ret.

Eboo Patel, Founder and ED, Interfaith Youth Core

Gregg Petersmeyer, Former Assistant to the President; Former Director, Office of National Service

Robert Putnam, Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School of Government

Marc Racicot, Former Governor, Montana

Brigadier General James R. Ralph Jr., USA Ret.

Usher Raymond IV, Recording Artist, ServiceNation Youth Chair

Bruce Reed, Democratic Leadership Council

Reverend Samuel Rodriguez, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

Major General Alan B. Salisbury, USA Ret.

Frederick A. O. Schwarz, Chief Counsel, Brennan Center for Justice, NYU Law School

David Shaw, Black Point Group

Billy Shore, Founder, Share our Strength

Edward Skloot, Director of Strategic Philanthropy and Civil Society, Duke University

Rodney Slater, Former U.S. Secretary of Transportation

Brigadier General Anthony A. Smith, USA Ret.

Lieutenant General Harry E. Soyster, USA Ret.

Colonel George Stone, USA Ret.

Colonel Townsend A. Van Fleet, USA Ret.

Lieutenant Colonel David Veney, USA Ret.

General Henry Viccellio Jr., USAF Ret.

Silda Wall Spitzer, Founder, Children for Children

Reverend Jim Wallace, Founder, Sojourner's Magazine

Colonel Thomas Williams, US Army Ret.

Harris Wofford, Former U.S. Senator

Ruth Wooden, President and CEO, Public Agenda

cc:

Senator Thad Cochran

Senator Daniel Inouye

Senator Edward Kennedy

Senator Michael Enzi

Senator Orrin Hatch

Senator Tom Harkin

Senator Arlen Specter

Representative George Miller

Representative Buck McKeon

Representative Carolyn McCarthy

Representative Obey

Representative Todd Platts

Representative Todd Tiahrt

* This message reflects the personal opinions of the signatories. Professional affiliations of these signatories are listed for identification purposes only.